The Dichotomy of Branding:
Discourses in the Orthodox Church of Finland

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Abstract

This article investigates branding in the Orthodox Church of Finland. How does the Orthodox Church discuss its public image, and how does the theoretical lens of branding add to this discussion? In this study church communication workers were interviewed, and church strategies examined. The results indicate that discourses within churches are diverse and even contradictory. In the identified discourses the authenticity of the church is defended and the improper nature of marketing is asserted. At the same time marketing techniques are considered useful: marketing strategies employ public image and visibility. Based on Beyer, it is suggested that interviewees place a greater emphasis on church function. Moreover, this article discusses how identified discourses contribute to a broader discussion of the Orthodox Church's relationship with modernity.

Keywords: *Orthodox Church; communication; branding; Finland*

In the Finnish countryside there are two Orthodox monasteries. A marketing magazine interviewed the Valamo Monastery in Eastern Finland about its brand development and tourism promotion through marketing professionals. During the interview it was stated that the Valamo Monastery 'could and should be marketed',[1] and that the 'strength' of the Orthodox Church lay in its constancy (Veljien vartijat). Part of the Orthodox Church of Finland (OCF) is therefore using marketing techniques, raising the question of whether the entire church is following the same path.

Sociologists have observed that religious change – culminating in detachment from the authorities and leaving historical churches – has the greatest

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1 Each citation of data is the author's translation of the Finnish original.

impact on established churches (Stolz and Usunier 2018, 15). It has been observed that the significance of the main church in Finland (the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, or the ELCF) has weakened in Finnish society and personal life (Ketola et al. 2016), and specifically, baptisms have declined (Hegstad). As the ELCF's membership continues to decrease, the organization employs a variety of methods such as advertising and marketing. The second established church in Finland is the OCF. It is commonly believed that the OCF is somehow unaffected by similar developments or is simply uninterested in marketing. Although the membership has remained relatively static, the OCF is not isolated from society or current phenomena; however, changes may seem less visible and less dramatic. Either way, church membership is increasingly being questioned. It is within this context that churches may utilize their reputation and brand more extensively.

According to Laitila (2015) 'some churches' are actively trying to find a place in the modern world. In pursuit of this goal, he writes, they address current issues and even change their public image as a result. In contrast with the ELCF the OCF has less actively constructed its public image or engaged in extensive campaigning.[2] Generally, the OCF is considered to have a relatively good public image (Ketola et al. 2016, 81, Palmu et al. 2012, 52–54) and may therefore feel the need to actively 'market' itself. According to Metso (2018) 'as a minority church, the Orthodox Church of Finland has not been subject to the same expectations and demands of society' as the mainline church and has therefore not been under pressure to change itself or actively participate in discussions of current issues.

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of how branding is discussed and constructed in official church strategy documents and interviews. The concept of branding is used as a theoretical lens for researching church communications. Despite the fact that this article operates on the concept of branding, it does not mean that churches will actually use it. This perspective will be discussed in more detail later. The research consists of two main strategies, two communication strategies, and six interviews with church employees engaged in communication. The article employs discourse analysis, focusing on themes that emerge in the language or text, to identify repertoires employed in the church. Furthermore, Beyer's (1994) theories of religion's function and performance will serve as a frame for the discussion section.

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2 For campaigns see Kokkonen 2020.

The Orthodox Church of Finland: a short history

With the ELCF the OCF is one of the two established churches in Finland (Laitila 2006, 157). Both these churches were established by the state and are often referred to as majority and minority churches: 66.5 per cent of Finns are members of the ELCF, and 1 per cent are members of the OCF (approximately 55,000) (Kirkon jäsenyys; Tilastotietoja kirkon väestöstä vuodelta 2021). Kupari and Vuola (2019) have written that the OCF can justifiably be considered an exceptional case among Orthodox Churches. It is simultaneously an autonomous national church and a small minority church embedded in a dominantly Lutheran society.

As Laitila (2006, 175) points out, the Orthodox Church in Finland is both Finnish and Orthodox. It is an autonomous part of the worldwide Orthodox Church, and it is primarily affiliated as such with the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople. The OCF has been present in Finnish Karelia since the twelfth century (Martikainen and Laitila 2014, 151). In 1918 the OCF was designated as Finland's second state church when Finnish Orthodoxy was reorganized into an autonomous regional church (Laitila 2006, 161, Metso 2017). During the Second World War 70 per cent of the church's members immigrated to Finland (Metso 2017). Simultaneously, a significant part of the material property was lost (Laitila 2006, 1666.) As Martikainen (2005, 118) has written, the identity of the church is quite complex, because it is both a minority and originally an immigrant church.

Throughout history the membership of the OCF has remained relatively constant. However, at the beginning of 2019 the OCF reported that the number of church members had decreased by more than 600 individuals. This was considered a major loss, because membership had fallen below 60,000 (Kirkon jäsenmäärään tuntuva lasku). In 2020 the number of members decreased in a similar manner (Luvut miinuksella, toiminta ja potentiaali plussalla). The reports talk about how more people are leaving the church, the number of baptisms is declining, and a 'lack of religious conviction has been found the main reason to leave the church' (Kirkon jäsenmäärään tuntuva lasku). In any community a steady decline in membership can indicate a serious issue.

Theoretical framework

In this article the theoretical framework is connected with the realm of neo-liberalism and consumerism. Indeed, they are closely linked: neoliberalism and consumerism constitute a joint process within which economics has

replaced politics as a defining and anchoring force (Gauthier 2020, 4; see also Gauthier, Martikainen, and Woodhead 2013b). In this context consumer culture represents a significant cultural influence. It refers to the spread of consumerism, which broadly validates consumption and its logic (Feather-stone 1991, Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013a, 4, 15; Miles 1998, 1; Slater 1997; Stolz and Usunier 2018, 3). In this article churches are placed within the context of a consumerist society in which consumerism and its impacts affect churches internally and externally.

Marketization is one of the characteristics of consumerism. It describes a phenomenon that either drives or shifts market-related practices and logic into previously non-economic areas of life (Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013a, 3) – that is, market-related practices are extended, and marketing penetrates areas that were previously unrelated to the market (Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen, 2013b). This article also discusses the church's attachment to this field.

Many sociologists (such as Gauthier, Woodhead, and Martikainen 2013a, Stolz and Usunier 2016) have written about the challenges religious institutions face in formulating their relationship with consumerism especially. Indeed, churches and other non-profit organizations have increasingly become market-oriented in response to operating in accordance with the prevailing culture and practices of the modern world: churches utilize secular methods or tools of marketing, advertising, and the reconstruction of their communication. Based on Moberg's (2017) discourse analysis, many European established churches have increasingly applied market methods, especially strategically. I have previously discussed how branding a main-line church can contribute to meaning-making (Kokkonen 2020). In a sense, as Stolz and Usunier (2018) argue, religions copy secular models that have demonstrated effectiveness in other areas of life. This process is commonly referred to as readjustment; new techniques are used to achieve one's goals.

Branding is a specific tool and an increasingly popular marketing concept. It is the process of communicating a particular image designed to attract attention to a product, service, or actor.[3] A brand is used to describe a public image that is deliberately constructed in marketing communications. Marketing generally refers to activities undertaken by a company or organization to market its product or service. As many non-profit organizations have undertaken both marketing and branding, their application has spread from gaining profit to stable membership or creating positive images, for

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3   See for example Gauthier et al. 2013a; Stolz and Usunier 2018, Aaker and Joachimstahler 2000.

example. Stolz and Usunier (2018) define branding as the process by which a public image is created through marketing communication. According to Krönert and Hepp (2010), branding is not just advertising or marketing but presenting oneself in accordance with a mediatized culture. Branding is actually an example of marketization in action.

The study of branding in small religious communities like the OCF has mainly concerned new religions (see e.g. Ringvee 2017). Modern studies of Orthodox churches have tended to focus on how they are perceived in mediated culture from the outside through newspapers and media, for example. Bayer and Rodinova (2020) examine the Russian Orthodox Church's image in the secular press. Coman (2019a) analyses the Orthodox Church of Romania, concluding that the church can be interpreted as a brand based on several aspects. Moreover, Coman (2019b) studies the kind of 'brand image' the Romanian Orthodox Church has on digital platforms.

The purpose of this article is to continue the discussion on established churches in a consumerized and marketized environment. Throughout this article, branding is defined as constructing a public image using a methodology from marketing communications. 'Brand' is primarily a theoretical lens through which church communication may be viewed. However, the term 'brand' also appears in the material, as we will see later. It is important to note that this phenomenon can be seen in two ways: first, a brand is a term through which material (interviewees) can also perceive church communications. This perspective is prevalent, because interviewees discuss the relationship between branding and the church. Second, the use of the term can imply something else: marketing terms and logic can also be subtly emphasized. The idea that marketization occurs widely in many areas supports this view.

Method

As the Finnish Orthodox Church is small, this article applies a qualitative methodology. The approach is detailed in the following.

In the field of religious studies Moberg (2017) has made use of a discursive perspective to study the marketization of churches. In his view discourse analytical frameworks and approaches must always be tailored to the particular needs of each study, so each new use necessarily leads to a combination of and modification of previous frameworks. In addition, discourse analysis is often used in conjunction with other theoretical perspectives, especially in religious studies (Moberg 2021, 31–32). Methodological

guides for discourse analysis developed by Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen have been used to study religions in Finland. Neither the discourse analysis they present nor discourse analysis in general is a clear-cut methodology. Instead, it affords a holistic perspective on social and cultural research. This study aims to use a customized method of discourse analysis in accordance with Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen (2016, 43, 47). As the original language is Finnish and has been translated to English, this review does not address linguistic issues. The following will present the starting points for this article based on the above premises.

Jokinen et al. (2016) have described how discourse analysis examines social practices, and how individuals use language in different situations, as well as the meaning systems they produce. They argue that this framework consists of five starting points based on the assumptions that 1) the use of language and social construction are related; 2) there are different (parallel or competing) systems of meaning; 3) relevant activities are contextual; 4) actors are attached to meaning systems; and 5) the use of language has consequences. In the following I briefly illustrate the basis of my premises.

In relation to the assumption that 1) using language and social construction are interconnected, Jokinen et al. (2016) identify three critical terms: constructivism; non-reflectivity; and meaning system. The constructivist viewpoint emphasizes that language is based on the assumption that language constructs social reality. All statements therefore describe and create something; they both describe and construct reality. The second concept, non-reflectivity, refers to the fact that language does not accurately reflect reality. Third, the idea of constructivism is closely attached to structuring language as socially shared meaning systems (Jokinen et al. 2016, 29, 34). The systems in question are termed discourses or interpretative repertoires (e.g. Suoninen 1992), and they are shaped by social practices. Interpretative discourse analysis seeks to identify common discourses that produce and maintain shared meanings and interpretations (Jokinen et al. 2016, 43, 338).

This article aims to identify hegemonic repertoires – or those that are common. According to Jokinen et al. (2016) hegemonic repertoires are identified by locating the data and paying attention to the similarities or parts of the same meaning systems. The more often a piece of a particular discourse is repeated and in more contexts, the more hegemonic the discourse is considered to be. The more self-evident and absolute it appears, the more effective it is, even if it does not dominate the material. It is useful to examine how the hegemonic discourses identified in the material are produced and reproduced, as discourses are not static. These questions ask how the

obvious ones are constructed, and whether hegemonization occurs unnoticed or consciously (Jokinen and Juhila 2016). In addition, sub-repertoires constituting hegemonic repertoires are identified.

The second starting point Jokinen et al. (2016) define is based on the premise that there are different (parallel or competing) systems of meaning. Language users may therefore operate in parallel or competing systems. Additionally, different repertoires interact with one another, which is described by the term intertextuality (or interdiscourse). An intertextual text always has a relationship with other texts (it argues in relation to them), and the presumed audience influences its production (Fairclough 1992, 127–129.)

This article seeks to examine how language is used and argued. It identifies and classifies discourses I have chosen to call repertoires. As observation units, these repertoires are categorized thematically and typified according to how they have been constructed. According to the theoretical framework described above the material can be identified according to the chosen topic. Consequently, to organize and categorize the data, it was assumed that the church had something to do with branding (or that communications could be interpreted through the branding lens), and the data were categorized based on this assumption. As a result, the focus is on how the church's relationship with 'branding' is constructed in language. The main focus is on how the OCF speaks, conveys its public image, and reflects its 'brand'. This is analysed in two ways: first, the church's strategies are reviewed to frame the official discourse of the OFC at the strategy level. The repertoires and identities the interviewees adopt are then examined, and what these repertoires reveal about branding the church is discussed.

Furthermore, only a few concepts from categories 3–5 (Jokinen et al. 2016) are used. The third starting point deals with contextuality, and the idea of cultural context is applied. It is important to consider the context in which an activity takes place, especially in relation to a specific period, place, or environment. Here, the context consists of theoretical starting points related to the surrounding temporal culture described in this article. In the fourth category the concepts of identity, subject position, and the user of discourse all function to describe the processes of speaker construction. For example, individuals can move between different positions and thus create different discourses by adhering to different meaning systems. In the fifth and final category the productive aspect of the consequences of language use is considered: that statements both claim and produce something (Jokinen et al. 2016). The data also construct a view of church branding, rather than simply describing it.

Data

Two types of data were collected for this article: official strategies and interviews. Furthermore, they form different types of genres, or the established production styles of texts (Jokinen, Juhila, and Suoninen 2016). Two major strategies and two communication strategies cover the decade between 2010 and 2020 in the strategy documents. The OCF began developing official strategies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. It has since published two main five-year strategies (Ortodoksisen kirkon strategia 2010–2015 and Tavoite- ja toimintasuunnitelma vuosille 2016–2020) and a communication strategy (Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon viestintästrategia 2010). A communication strategy from the Orthodox Parish of Helsinki is also included (Helsingin ortodoksinen seurakunta. Viestintästrategia 2017–2019). It is the largest parish in Finland, with a third of all Orthodox Finns belonging to it.

As discussed earlier, the Finnish Orthodox Church is a relatively small organization. Only a few individuals are involved in the church's communication: one employee for the entire church, another with Russian-speaking members, and one for the Parish of Helsinki. A fourth communications-related employee, the archbishop's theological assistant, provides information and communication about the archbishop. Based on the estimations and information gathered from the interviewees, approximately ten people were employed in these four occupations between 2010 and 2020, including permanent employees and substitutes. In this study they were contacted personally, and six were interviewed. Despite its small size, the sample of six is comprehensive given the size of the church administration, the number of employees, and the qualitative approach. The interviews were conducted between 2018 and 2020, ranging from half an hour to two and a half hours.[4] To preserve anonymity, more detailed occupations are not provided. No additional identification or connecting separate citation is provided. Furthermore, dialects and any other recognizable ways of speaking have been eliminated when translating the citations to English.

The thematic interviews were conducted to discuss carefully selected topics. The themes chosen included the church's public communication, the role of the interviewee in it, and general communication and its development in the church. Additionally, examples such as the ELCF's publicity campaigns were brought up to stimulate discussion and ask further questions.

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4 All but two interviews were conducted in person. One was conducted by email, and the other by telephone, both at the interviewee's request.

Pre-interview research indicated the interviewees might find it difficult to discuss the church's public image, not to mention a particular emphasis on branding. Since the intention was not to examine the brand of the church as such but to use it as a research premise, additional materials were used. These materials allowed discussion without the interviewer offering an outside perspective.[5] Additional materials included specific citations related to 'public image', 'visibility', and 'strengths' from the strategies (similar to those discussed in more detail in the analysis) and a shortened version of a blog by an Orthodox Church employee entitled 'Give the devil your little finger? The church and brands',[6] which discussed the Orthodox Church in terms of branding both critically and humorously. Using materials from the 'inside', that is, with the words of the actual members, provided an opportunity to introduce topics such as image construction to the discussion.

In the following analysis strategies are considered first, followed by interviews. The question addressed is how branding is constructed within the OCF, and in more detail what the socially constructed repertoires within the OCF are. Several hegemonic repertoires and their supporting sub-repertoires are identified and discussed in what follows.

Strategies strengthening the church's image

All the strategies reflect the church's public image in various ways, but do not operate through the concept of 'brand'. However, image building and branding have similar purposes in that both endeavour to control the public image. A repertoire constructed through strategies can be classified as *strengthening the church's image*. This hegemonic repertoire shows that considering the image is a normal part of the church's activities. As outlined in the following, it is evident in each successive strategy.

The first main strategy (Ortodoksisen kirkon strategia 2010–2015) emphasized 'strengthening' the church's image and stated that the church needed a communication strategy to 'create a positive public image'. The church faces a challenge: to 'be visible in the media at the right time and in the right way' but also to 'ensure positive visibility in society'. Furthermore, the church should be 'known as a community having mentors and advanced father confessors' (Ortodoksisen kirkon strategia 2010–2015).

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5 The Finnish Orthodox Church is quite small, and it was evident from the interviewees that the researcher was not a member. Many respondents wanted to ask about the issue at the beginning of the interview.

6 Orig. Pikkusormi pirulle – kirkko ja brändit.

The hegemonic repertoires of strengthening a positive church image and visibility are repeated.

Similarly, the second main strategy stresses the importance, because the 'church's positive public image' must be 'strengthened'. In addition, church communication is supposed to 'support the public visibility of the church's strengths'. Furthermore, communications are intended to present the church as an 'alternative' and 'a counterweight to a busy and demanding life' (Tavoite- ja toimintasuunnitelma 2016–2020). Both main strategies thus emphasize themes with similar repertoires. Certain core themes are also identified for the church, emphasizing the church's spiritual leadership and support, as well as its role as an alternative to a demanding lifestyle.

The theme of strengthening positive visibility continues in the church's communications strategy (Suomen ortodoksisen kirkon viestintästrategia), in which communication and information are defined as part of the church's operations. Communication is supposed to 'ensure that church members, partners and society have the correct image of the Orthodox Church and sufficient information about its operation and the services it provides'. According to the strategy the purpose of church communications is to build the atmosphere and image of the church. Communications and information have 'strengthening a positive image' as their strategic objective. In addition, both the church's internal and external communication aims to 'raise awareness'. The emphasis is thus on broad objectives rather than defining specific aims. Additionally, the theme of services is introduced: the church is a service provider in some respect.

Finally, the communications strategy of the parish of Helsinki (Helsingin ortodoksinen seurakunta. Viestintästrategia 2017–2019) follows the same theme. The document calls on staff members to enhance the public image of the parish as 'part of the Finnish Orthodox Church'. Moreover, 'the publicist is responsible for media affairs, building a positive public image'. In this document further consideration is given to the identification of messages in the strategy: 'the basic messages of the parish express its goals as part of the strategic goals of the OCF and express everything essential (in words): why the church exists, what it strives for, and what means and values guide its operations. Basic messages convey a recognizable image'. This strategy emphasizes the importance of essential messages. However, the messages themselves are not defined. In addition, the strategy highlights the importance of staff – 'every parish employee influences the church's reputation and publicity through their own communications' – and underlines 'reputation leadership' without further explanation.

Viewing the material in the context of marketing, it is evident that several marketing concepts are formed in these strategies. First, the idea of a basic message is introduced (but not defined), although some key themes are suggested. Second, the notions of the church as a service provider and reputation leadership are addressed. Furthermore, hegemonic repertoire is evident in all the strategies examined here, which highlights the importance of public image. Each of these strategies addresses issues such as increasing visibility, strengthening the church's (already positive) image, or presenting the church in a particular aspect. According to these documents the OCF not only discusses its public image but actively constructs it. However, the construction of the strategies is not shared, as shown below. Based on the discussion presented below, it appears the interviewees have quite different repertoires: the strategies do not appear to reflect the interviewees' realities.

The Church does not brand

According to the interviewees the church does not deliberately brand itself or construct its image. This is the first hegemonic repertoire in this material.

> In my opinion the Finnish Orthodox Church hasn't joined this branding. (Interview 4.)

> Looking at the church's core mission, well, it isn't hanging around in the media but offering worship, baptizing, and burying people. (Interview 1.)

> It isn't our priority to build a positive image. (Interview 2.)

This repertoire differs fundamentally from the strategies. Most interviewees deny that the OCF uses branding and argue that issues as such are not even discussed within it. According to the interviewees the church does not apply marketing tools in general. It is somewhat repetitive, because five out of six interviewees averred that marketing was inappropriate for the church. This hegemonic repertoire is entangled with tensions associated with the relationship between marketing and the church. According to all the study's interviewees marketing, advertising, and branding is not generally supported or favoured in the Orthodox Church, and marketing communications are perceived to be inappropriate or unsuitable for church settings. In the citations above the impropriety was evident, but it was further emphasized in the following passages:

> I don't see that it [branding] is the mission of church's communication, because anything we bring to the centre if it is not Christ is the wrong thing [to raise]. (Interview 1.)

> We cannot raise something that sells more in this age as a point of communication beyond our basic message. (Interview 1.)

> Does our own message remain in it any longer? (Interview 3.)

The hegemonic repertoire is constructed and justified in accordance with the church's essence or nature: marketing is unsuitable because something essential may be lost – namely, the church's message. The repertoire I classify as *the church does not brand* is structured through four supporting sub-repertoires, which will be discussed next.

Four of the interviewees stated that the OCF already had an image and therefore did not construct an additional image. There was some variation in how this was stated. Yet all four interviewees regarded the church as having a distinctive quality, a strong feature, or even a pre-existing brand – without any effort on the part of the communications. This image or brand was described in various ways: one interviewee said that the 'church's brand is face-centred', another that 'when we are visible, we are usually always the exotic, good-scented, beautiful, a little mystical'. Timelessness, a positive disconnection from the present, dogmatic unity, and originality were all mentioned by these four interviewees. For example:

> We're with the Catholics here; we have a very different passage of time in the church because [the Orthodox Church] is not hectically attached to this day in the same way [as the rest of the world]. (Interview 2.)

> Our strength is clearly our dogmatic unity [...] We are clearly unanimous regarding different things. If you ask any of our priests, they will give you exactly the same answers. (Interview 1.)

> The core message of our church, or one of them, would probably be that we would want, or the Orthodox Church wants, to communicate that it is the original, the Church of Christ. For 2,000 years, all the traditions and everything have been preserved originally in the Orthodox Church. We are real, caring, anyone can come, tolerant, and so on – and everything attached to it. We would probably like to communicate that we're a praying church and the real original [church]. (Interview 4.)

According to three interviewees the church was already a strong and positive brand:

> There is demand for the Orthodox Church, and its richness is found especially in the strong brand that it already has. And it's pretty positive. (Interview 4.)

> When we talk about the public image of the Orthodox Church of Finland and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, I feel the analogy is that there is *an* Evangelical Lutheran church, and then there is *the* Orthodox Church [italics added]. (Interview 1.)

> If you have a good product [as the church is], it is itself a brand. (Interview 2.)

It is noteworthy that although the sub-repertoires are diverse, they are united in describing the church as an existing feature by its nature. However, the most important aspect is that it does not require an image, because its 'brand' is embodied in its character. At this point, therefore, the term 'brand' is used to indicate that the church does not construct it.

Several interviewees also emphasized that the OCF's membership of the worldwide church was a second reason for the lack of branding. They also pointed out that the Finnish church was not fully independent in its decision making. Although this reasoning might be considered organizational in nature, it is also connected with the church's nature. Accordingly, the OCF is neither able nor equipped to make brand-related decisions:

> I would say that we cannot affect the brand because it is global, like the brand of the Catholic Church. We here in Finland cannot build it. You don't build McDonald's brand in Finland either [...] In the same way [...] as the Catholic Church of Finland is not a separate [fortress], the Orthodox feel they are part of Christ's church. Maybe the members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church think they are part of four million people. However, we think we are part of 270 million people. As a brand, we're part of a worldwide brand. (Interview 1.)

> Then there are certain things that would not change, because our church isn't in the position of decision making. I know we wouldn't even discuss them. (Interview 4.)

Based on the third sub-repertoire of reasons – the OCF does not brand – the OCF does not seek to increase its membership, so its image is targeted at its existing Orthodox members rather than the general public. The interviewees stressed that the Orthodox understanding of Christian mission did not involve 'converting'. The Orthodox Church therefore does not aim for public communication in this sense. Furthermore, the church's incapacity to make independent decisions is demonstrated.

> The Orthodox Church has never walked from door to door; our history does not recognize this type of mission or shouting on street corners. In our church, the mission has been understood as we're here, and if anyone comes in the door, they're welcome. (Interview 1.)

Thus far, it has been noted that interviewees express the view that the church does not brand because of the nature of its image. It is made clear that the church is not an independent or non-public organization and is not a marketing institution. Yet this may reflect a broader tradition that the church and marketing are incompatible. However, there are other parallel or even competing views, which will be discussed next.

The fourth sub-repertoire for the lack of branding is justified from a slightly different perspective, because it is based on the organizational obstacles to marketing. As the interviewees point out, there is a conflict between communication professionals and church leaders (i.e. theological employees). Four of the six interviewees shared this view. As these interviewees stated, the leaders of the OCF did not fully understand the importance of communication to the operation of the church. In the opinion of interviewees communication is the image the church projects, and this contributes to retaining the church's position in society. The interviewees describe a lack of clarity and direction in church communication:

> [Strategic communication] is very important, and [I wish] that we would stop to think about the current state, where we are. Even when talking about a church, communication must have some aims, as we do, because it's very hard to communicate if there is absolutely no united line. (Interview 3.)

> We're shooting on a large scale at everything possible and just hoping that something will hit the target. (Interview 3.)

The interviewees reported a lack of guidance and support in communication:

> If I'm honest, it [the church's official webpage] is very difficult, in a manner

of speaking, to find the church's tone there; the so-called tone of voice is very difficult to follow. (Interview 3.)

Of course, we should know where we're heading and why. It's a key thing. Obviously, the communications need to think about the kind of image we want. (Interview 2.)

Several communication workers were looking for a model for how to communicate or act in the public sphere. Public appearance and comments were key to maintaining a positive public image according to the interviewees. The leaders' public visibility in the media differed from communication workers' perspectives in this respect:

There has not really been a culture of the archbishop discussing his opinion. [...] [I would like] us to move in a direction in which, for example, the archbishop commented more actively on various situations, joined the conversation. (Interview 4.)

The initiative must come from the church's leaders [...] I would say that there we are trying to grow our media space, but, as I said, if the church leaders aren't committed, it's pretty hard to do. (Interview 1.)

We won't be able to get from words to actions until the leaders courageously lead the troops and don't take a position safely at the back. (Interview 5.)

A few interviewees mentioned that the church could be made more visible in both traditional and social media, for example. The OCF and ELCF are compared as follows:

Compared with the situation in the Evangelical Lutheran Church [...] [the bishops] take a lot of initiative in it [public commenting]. Our situation is very much the opposite. (Interview 1.)

Indeed, two interviewees hoped for active engagement on social media:

However, if we had a Twitter account, for example, 'the Orthodox Church of Finland', we might be able to get involved in the kind of discussions about values in which we should be involved. (Interview 1.)

Or a really good bishop can be active. A bishop could have a Twitter account. (Interview 4.)

Workers were expected to communicate professionally, but the leadership was reluctant to specify a specific message. It appeared the interviewees were even interested in introducing new (marketing) methods to the church, but the church leaders did not agree. In addition, this sub-repertoire also validates the hegemonic repertoire of why the church does not brand. It is currently determined by the circumstances.

The hegemonic repertoire that the church does not brand has thus far been justified with two sets of sub-repertoires, based on the church's nature and organizational structure. However, these repertoires are not opposites but parallels. The reasoning attached to the church's nature would seem to fit the church's general understanding of Orthodoxy and tradition and the social construction of its community as constant and established. However, the organizational reasoning forms a sub-repertoire of its own. An explanation for these parallel sub-repertoires may be found in terms of identity and subject position, because interviewees' portrayal of themselves may influence the repertoire they create. In discourses people may favour many approaches, not one (Jokinen et al. 2016). In addition, individuals may use language and construct meanings differently, depending on the context. People can define themselves in various, sometimes conflicting, ways (Jokinen et al. 2016, 44). One reason for emphasizing the church's nature is connected with the preconditions (Jokinen et al., 2016, 49), because interviewees are both parishioners and communication professionals. They may thus consider themselves as representing both the organizational communications and the social construction of parishioners. When the interviewees described themselves as communication specialists reflecting marketing possibilities, they emphasized administrative reasons. Furthermore, the theme is developed in the following sections, because the second hegemonic repertoire is even opposed to the first.

Marketing is appropriate and recommended

Applying marketing to the church is even recommended as a second hegemonic repertoire. This hegemonic repertoire overlaps with the first – the church does not brand – and intersects with the supporting sub-repertoire rooted in the protection of the church's nature. Nevertheless, it does align and validate justifications based on the organizational rationale. Intertextuality – argumentation in relation to others – is thus demonstrated. Ultimately, these two hegemonic repertoires coexist despite their differences.

This hegemonic repertoire is notable in that all the interviewees stated

that they would consider concessions (to the line of not marketing or branding the church), as long as the actions were carried out in a manner that was compatible with 'the nature of the church'. This theme also overlaps significantly with the prevention of such practices by leaders, although this repertoire is not exclusively concerned with these issues. The interviewees provided the following examples:

> Well, I would see that [an outdoor advertising campaign] wouldn't be completely ruled out if properly planned. (Interview 3.)

> We do think about the church's public image a lot… We're aware of it – we wish to mould it obviously to be positive and in a way that would make the Orthodox Church and parish approachable, even for new members. (Interview 6.)

> If it's well planned, it [campaigning] isn't ruled out. But I cannot say right now what it could be. If we wanted to produce an outdoor advertisement, what themes would we want to raise? (Interview 3.)

Campaigning emerged primarily for two reasons: first, the interview questions included a presentation of ELCF campaigns. Another reason is that the campaigning of the Lutheran Church is already well established, as the church has organized publicity campaigns since at least the end of the 1990s (Kokkonen 2020).

Various formulations were given to justify the concessions described above. One was that although the church is considered a special case, it should also remain connected to modern life, or 'the world', and the church could, or even should, communicate in a contemporary manner:

> The church has a balancing act in both the ecclesiastical community and the world. Maybe that's the biggest difference – how to find the balance. Perhaps they're not that separate from each other. (Interview 3.)

> I wish we could be proactive instead of reactive, that we wouldn't only react to what has already happened, afterwards. More like, we would plan and think – if we wish to come up with something, we need to think of how, [...] what is the angle, and when. (Interview 4.)

Financial limitations were also frequently mentioned:

But we have no resources or whatever to have any strategic media com-
munications operations. (Interview 1.)

In general, concessions were described in various ways, often indirectly:

As I said, all communications must put one's money where one's mouth is. If
we create a specific message for the public, people's experience must match
it. Suppose we advertise ourselves as or make ourselves close to people, a
warm, very traditional, and kind of strong-minded community – if someone
comes to church or is in contact with church social work, the experience has
to match [what was advertised]. (Interview 6.)

I don't know if anyone dares to say out loud yet what the brand or image
the church wants to have in public. (Interview 2.)

Citations such as those presented here provide an exception to the statement
that marketing does not belong in a church context: a proper application. Most
interviewees expressed a positive attitude towards some 'new' communication
areas such as marketing, advertising, campaigning, sending a clear message
about the church, or establishing a public presence, or branding. Five out
of six interviewees explained this by describing how the OCF could utilize
new methods and even organize publicity campaigns, as indicated above.
The interviewees indicated that the church could apply these methods when
applifications were carefully considered. 'Daring' to suggest a new image is
very intriguing, because it may reveal something about the culture. It at least
reveals a distinction is being made between the sacred and profane.

In this hegemonic repertoire of applying new methods, the interview-
ees clearly placed themselves as communication professionals. It seems
to represent the formation of a subject position. They often refer to their
'understanding of communications', as well as their willingness to engage
in communications. In interviewees' repertoires the church conflicts with
secular marketing, but they simultaneously offer their own repertoire, po-
sitioning themselves as professional communicators. Some interviewees
described communication as expert-driven, implying that communication
workers guide communications in the church:

The church's [only] publicist has very free hands to develop communica-
tion. (Interview 4.)

The communication has originated from professionals. (Interview 3.)

Similarly, this repertoire is related to something previously discussed: church leaders make major decisions, while communicators have relatively great responsibility and freedom. Nevertheless, some sort of contradiction is formulated.

In these discussions the nature of the church is valued, but a dichotomy between the original church and 'modern' practices is also articulated when the interviewees describe the church from the perspective of their profession, and the two distinct hegemonic repertoires arrive at a crossroads. They identify the traditional meeting of the modern, and how the church would benefit from marketing and new methods. This is further elaborated in the next chapter.

Between two constructions

The purpose of this article was to identify discussions of branding in the OCF. As a result, two main constructions may be viewed as parallel hegemonic repertoires. These two hegemonic repertoires overlap to some extent, and their boundaries are often blurred.

Diverse data construct quite different realities that may overlap with or even contradict one another. For example, the strategies have their hegemonic repertoire for visibility and strengthening the church's image. Furthermore, the strategies emphasize the importance of public image as a vital part of the church's operations. There are also some market-based core ideas such as key messages. Nevertheless, as the interviewees' speech indicates, this is not a shared reality, because the strategies do not correspond to the interviewees' views. The interviewees do not fully share a repertoire constructed in the strategies, at least not to the point where underlining the church's image is completely normalized. It can be said that the repertoire of strategies is far ahead of the constructions of communication professionals.

Constructions are diverse throughout the interviewees' hegemonic repertoires, and how they are constructed. In response to the question of whether the church should be branded or not, or to strengthen its image, the interviewees embrace different positions simultaneously. Accordingly, they construct the hegemonic repertoire *the church does not brand* based on both its nature and its organizational structure. Additionally, interviewees mention external causes, because they perceive that they lack autonomy regarding all communications. Marketing, the second hegemonic reper-

toire of interviewees, is appropriate and recommendable and more related to strategies, despite the fact that interviewees construct a future in which strategies already prevail. The interviewees agree that the church should benefit from adopting new methods when they are applied properly. Nevertheless, these concessions need to be appropriate to the church's nature and character. The church is thus viewed both as a special case and as part of society.

As illustrated here, some actors may be more willing than others to copy secular methods, even within the same organization. According to Beyer (1994, 79–94) religion is either characterized by its function or its performance. This theory provides a somewhat suitable framework for discussing this case. Beyer maintains that the concerns raised in performance-oriented religiosity are not primarily religious issues. For example, social problems are emphasized. Yet an approach that emphasizes the function of religion is typical of conservative groups and churches. This emphasizes religion's spiritual function. Beyer has written about how function focuses on a core spiritual mission, whereas performance results in applying religion to broader social problems. Religion is prioritized as something to be taken seriously and as a valid message for this age. This division makes it easy to see that the OCF is actually more centred on function – that is, its transcendent core message. Even in this material it is apparent that the church is not particularly keen on current issues, and that the focus is usually more on the function. According to Beyer (1994, 93) 'religion in the modern world takes on a privatized or a public face depending on whether one is looking at religious function or religious performance'. The function is particularly highlighted in this study when the interviewees emphasize the fundamental nature of the church. Although the strategies seek to increase the church's visibility, they also emphasize the church's qualities such as the church as a counterweight to the world or the spiritual life of its members. Yet this emphasis has an echo of performance –something other than the core function.

A fundamental contradiction exists here regarding the application of marketing elements to the church. To discuss the church's role as both an eternal institution and part of society, it is necessary to discuss both Orthodox tradition and modernity. The analysis suggests that the OCF is positioned as both part of the contemporary world and as eternal and static; this opposition is evident throughout the repertoires that are constructed. The consumerized and marketized world serves as a setting for the 'modern' that Orthodoxy 'encounters'. Marketing in general reflects the adoption of secular methods to church contexts (Stolz and Usunier 2016) that also occurs

in established churches. Makrides (2012) asserts that the Orthodox world generally has difficulty assimilating the multiple products of modernity that Western Christianity has already embraced. As Laitila (2006, 175) has described, the OCF's character or 'aim has [often] been to preserve rather than change'. Willert and Molokotos-Liederman (2012) have written that terms such as 'innovation' have negative connontations, and Orthodoxy therefore generally prefers to emphasize 'renewal' or 'renovation' if the tradition is somehow 'changed'. However, Orthodox churches differ from each other somewhat because of their national and local bonds and depending on their ties to a 'mother church' like the Russian Orthodox Church. As Orthodox communities have lived in diaspora in many Western countries like Finland, Makrides (2012) writes that 'their long presence and interaction in a plural and multicultural context has rendered these Orthodox different in many respects'. Furthermore, the Finnish Orthodox Church represents a distinct community that is seamlessly connected with the Finnish sphere and is therefore not directly comparable with any other church.

At this point it can already be said that the OCF does not exist in isolation from the consumerist market society around it. Pettersson (2013, 56) has argued that churches must change their communication methods. Taking this analysis into account, the OCF does not appear to know how to address this 'must'. Yet data show that certain actors (at least those in charge of strategies) actively promote market-related ideas. In Finland the OCF has generally enjoyed a positive image and stable membership. There is no doubt that this has significantly affected how the Orthodox Church perceives the necessity of improving its public image – or rather the lack of necessity. It may be that Valamo monastery, mentioned at the beginning of this article, is an exception in its marketing strategy in the OCF, because tourism is the monastery's main source of income.

It is notable that the majority church in Finland (the ELCF) has applied marketing and branding by adopting some aspects and eschewing others (Kokkonen 2019). It has also implemented additional messages as a societal actor (Kokkonen 2020). It could be said that the OCF is at least considering something similar, since the requirement for proper application and benefit is apparent. According to the strategies it appears the OCF is enhancing its public image and visibility, but the interviews indicate that nothing concrete has occurred beyond the strategies. Even when the church has its own meaning – the core that should not be touched or altered – the results of this study illustrate how church discussions revolve around public visibility. The most important motive is probably to ensure, validate, and

justify the status of churches in society in the future. Moreover, examining church communications from the perspective of branding leads to at least two conclusions. First, the Orthodox Church actively defines its relationship with branding and marketing in general. Second, some hidden practices can be identified using the chosen theoretical lens of branding: the church uses some marketing and even branding ideas, especially in the strategies, because it discusses its public image and visibility in ways that are partly consistent with branding in general. Finally, many communication professionals in churches stated that marketing could benefit the church.

As is typical of qualitative discourse analysis, the data and results of this study cannot be generalized but present a perspective based on selected data and the theoretical frame. It is not the aim of this study to give an absolute answer but to provide an overview of discursive constructions through selected examples. A reader is provided with an overview of the strategy work, employee discussions, and divisions of the Finnish Orthodox Church, centred around selected themes.

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